

VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

UNITED STATES AND WORLD CURRICULUM GRADES 8-12 STUDENT HANDOUT, LESSON 7

THEME: CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED; WHOSE CONSENT?

In the discussions over the new Constitution of 1787 and the new system of government it would create, a debate arose between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. The former group felt that "those most fit to rule should govern" while the latter group feared that an aristocracy would result. Trying to protect our fledgling democracy, views like the two below conveyed the opinion that consent (voting) to be governed must come not only from the elite, but from ALL the people:

"Who are to be the electors of the ... representatives? Not the rich, more than the poor; not the learned more than the ignorant; not the haughty heirs of distinguished names more than the humble sons of obscurity...The electors are to be the great body of the people of the United States."

(James Madison, Fifth US President)

"Restraining the right of suffrage to the property holders would create a division among the people and make enemies of all those who should be excluded."

(Edward Rutledge, signer of the Declaration of Independence, delegate to the Constitutional Convention)

Despite the vision of these men that all Americans would have a voice in the direction of their government, the truth is that in our nation's past, there were many ways that certain people were excluded from voting. These are listed below in the activity.

The activity is designed so you can become acquainted with the evolutionary struggle to increase the size of the "voting pie" so all could have a piece. You will soon find that the struggle involved not only efforts by and for African-Americans and women, but also other races, the poor, the uneducated, various religions, citizens abroad and the physically challenged. You will also see that at times our right to vote took "Two steps forward, then one step back" as the saying goes.

ACTIVITY:

These are some of the obstacles that prevented voting rights for many citizens throughout our nation's history. Read the list on the left first, then the directions that follow.

OBSTACLE:

Religion:

Lack of property holdings:

Inability to pay a fee:

Lack of English fluency or literacy:

Having been a slave or their ancestor having been a slave:

Unable to register:

Having a disability:

Gender:

Race:

Absent on Election Day:

Education:

Age:

TO ELIMINATE THE OBSTACLE:

Examine the TIMELINE OF SUFFRAGE HISTORY handout and locate Amendments, sections in the Constitution, laws, and key people that made it possible for more people to "dine at the table of suffrage."

Using only the TIMELINE OF SUFFRAGE HISTORY, list for each obstacle, on the lines provided, the law, Amendment, Section, and/or person that tried to eliminate that particular obstacle to suffrage for all. Write your findings on the lines. To save space, you can just list the letter corresponding to the event, instead of writing out the entire event. Hint: Maybe you'll think that more than one item in the TIMELINE applies to an obstacle; maybe more than one obstacle is attacked by a law, provision or action. It is possible; just be able to support your view.

If time permits, you may be asked to share and explain your choices; i.e., why or how a law, Amendment, Section, and/or person countered the obstacle to voting for a particular group.

You probably had some great observations, questions or insights while working with the TIMELINE. Perhaps you noticed some curious patterns or repetitions, or maybe you saw some contradictions. For example, notice that some items actually INCREASE obstacles to voting; which ones? Another thing that you might notice is that some items are aimed at an obstacle NOT on the list; can you suggest what obstacle might be the target for item Q for example? Write your observations, questions, and insights when they occur to you so you don't forget and so you can share them.